

Colorado Department of Public Health & Environment Guidelines for Mail Workers

Revised: November 14, 2001

There have been no positive tests for anthrax and no human cases of anthrax in Colorado. The risk of exposure to anthrax spores for persons handling and processing mail in Colorado should be considered extremely low. However, public and private mail workers are understandably concerned and can take precautions to protect themselves from possible exposure to anthrax spores. A detailed description of these recommendations is outlined in “*CDC Interim Recommendations for Protecting Workers from Exposure to Bacillus anthracis in Work Sites Where Mail Is Handled or Processed*” (revised 10/31/01) at: www.bt.cdc.gov/ShowAllNewsItems.asp

The Colorado Department of Public Health & Environment recommends the following protective measures for workers who handle mail:

Engineering controls: Anthrax spores can be aerosolized during the operation and maintenance of high-speed, mail-sorting machines. In settings where such machinery is used, the following engineering controls should be considered: 1) increased local exhaust ventilation at pinch roller areas; 2) use of high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filters in HVAC systems (if feasible) to capture air-borne spores; 3) air curtains (using laminar air flow) in areas where large amounts of mail are processed; 4) HEPA-filtered exhaust hoods.

Administrative controls: Where feasible, limit the number of persons with access to machinery (e.g. mail sorting machines) or work areas (mailbag unloading) where aerosolized particles may be generated.

Housekeeping controls: Dry sweeping, dusting and use of compressed air to clean equipment can result in spores becoming air-borne and should be avoided. Instead, areas and machinery should be wet-cleaned and vacuumed with HEPA-equipped vacuum cleaners.

Personal protective equipment: Personal protective equipment for workers in mail-handling/processing work sites must be selected on the basis of the potential for exposure to anthrax spores. Handling packages or envelopes may result in cutaneous (skin) exposure. Certain machinery (e.g., electronic mail sorters) can generate aerosolized particles; therefore, persons who operate, maintain, or work near such machinery may be exposed through inhalation.

Workers Who Handle Mail

- Use of protective, impermeable gloves (e.g. nitrile or vinyl; avoid latex gloves).
- Do not wear gloves if such use presents an occupational hazard (i.e. near machinery).
- Use of long-sleeved clothing and long pants.
- Regular, thorough-hand washing with soap and water, especially after handling mail.

Workers Who May be Exposed through Inhalation

- Persons working near electronic mail sorters or at other sites where aerosolized particles may be generated (e.g. mailbag unloading) should be fitted with NIOSH-approved respirators that are at least as protective as an N95 respirator.
- Poorly fitting respirators, dust or surgical masks provide inadequate protection; facial hair interferes with the fit of respirators.
- Use of disposable aprons and goggles may provide extra protection.